

EPA starts talks on cleanup of Superfund site

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GRIFFITH — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confirmed Tuesday it has begun negotiations with alleged toxic waste handlers to clean up a federal Superfund site here.

Art Gasior, community relations coordinator of the EPA, said the Superfund site involves:

- The American Chemical Services, a solvent reclamation and chemical manufacturing firm on Colfax Street, one-half mile north of Turkey Creek.
- KAPICA Drum Inc., a former drum reconditioning facility that was adjacent to the ACS site.

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□ A Griffith sanitary landfill located south of the chemical company. The town bought land from ACS for the landfill in 1978-80.

Gasior said the EPA contacted as many as 800 alleged handlers this spring to get them to pay for cleanup costs. The list has been pared down since, he said. The town of Griffith remains on the contact list.

The Superfund site has had a long and complicated history, Gasior said.

From 1955 to 1972, Gasior said ACS disposed of waste from its operation in an open landfill on their property. From 1968 to 1970, it allegedly dumped incineration ash in the containment area and up to 30,000 drums and general refuse of unreclaimed waste. The EPA also believes a tank truck partially-filled with sludge may be buried in the area.

Gasior said Indiana's Board of Health became aware of the situation in 1972. EPA records show oil leaking from the site in 1980 was found to contain a carcinogen. Runoff from the drum reconditioning facility was detected in 1983.

Gasior said the Griffith landfill is included in the Superfund site because it is suspected waste from the two companies was disposed in the land prior to 1980.

The EPA began developing a workplan in August 1985 for the Superfund site, Gasior said, but remedial investigation has been delayed. He said the EPA is waiting to hear how much Superfund money will be reauthorized for the Griffith project.

Gasior said no public hearings have been held. Until remedial work progresses, Gasior said he does not want to name the chemicals on the site. He said he also does not know if contaminants have leaked into the water tables.

To say anything right now would open a Pandora's box, Gasior said. "It's a bad situation we hope to correct."

Gasior said a remedial investigation to learn exactly what is on site takes 14 to 18 months. He said water tables are also checked to see if the chemicals have left the site and entered wells, nearby creeks or streams or the groundwater.

Earlier this week, the Lake County Drainage Board discussed whether or not it would test Turkey Creek to see if contaminants have infiltrated the water. Their wetland cleanup project was halted by the state this spring due to suspicion the contaminated sediment had entered the creek.

Griffith Trustee, Meritath Hamrath, 33rd, said the town realizes a major problem exists at the Superfund site. "Everyone is tip-toeing around it," she said.

Hamrath said she does not fault the chemical company for its past practices, as little was known about toxic chemical handling years ago. Also, she said there were few EPA guidelines governing its disposal and use.

But Hamrath said that won't make the site go away. "We have a problem that has to be cleaned up," Hamrath said. "And it should have been cleaned up yesterday, or the day before."

